DEPICTIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS RELATING TO THE PRODUCTION AND MAKE OF AMERICAN INDIAN TRADE POINT BLANKETS DURING THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

E-Mail: sugarbushb@gmail.com

LETTERS AND DESCRIPTIONS

"Good out of Evil." *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser,* 20 May 1808

"I wrote you a line yesterday, which I hope has claimed your attention. Tench Cox has advertised for cotton blankets and *other cotton manufactures for cloathing*—each blanket will weigh 3 1-2lb. of cotton—10,000 are immediately wanted, and perhaps 30,000; they will be made here. Camac has a wool-carding machine which he bought for less than $100. One man will card 50lb. Of wool for hatters, at 5 cents. per lb.

"Six Millions of American Blankets." *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser,* 12 October 1808

A fair and careful experiment of the manufacture of *the cotton blankets* for the use of the hospitals has been recently made under a contract with the Purveyor's office. The class of blankets attempted by the office is that denominated "*three point twilled*." They were ordered to be made of the weight of 56 ounces each, or three pounds and a half. They have a broad blue stripe at each end, with three blue points; and measure 6 feet in length (or 50 yadrs for a piece of 20 blankets) and four feet and one half in breadth. The contract price is two dollars and one quarter for each blanket, of the above dimensions and weight, which will be found greater than the medium quality of the British three point twilled woolen blanket.

The cotton yarn is spun at the Factory of Mr. Joseph Garlick, and the weaving is executed in the Factory of Mr. ----- M'Ginnis. It is ascertained that the shortest upland cotton will make the best blanket, as the fibres are more easily raised, without breaking, into a regular and thick coal of pile by the cards, which are applied for that purpose, as the last operation in the manufacture. The blankets prove to be handsome, firm and excellent goods, meriting frank acceptance by the office and decided approbation.

Seven millions and one half of persons in the United States, at six on a medium in each house, give at the allowance of only five blankets to a family, the immense number of 6,250,000 blankets in present use in this country. The odd number (50,000) will serve all the purposes of persons, who sleep without the cover of houses, from the nature of their employments and pursuits. The remainder will require 21,700,000 lbs. of that cotton, of which British orders of council and French imitation instruct the sales. It is respectfully submitted whether the duty on woollen blankets should not be raised on the fourth of July, to ----- per centum, if foreign governments do not appear before the rising of Congress, to return to the rule of law of nations—the law of morals.

"American Cotton Blankets." *The Reporter*, 27 October 1810

It is an interesting piece of information to the manufacturers of the United States, that they may have a convenient opportunity of seeing the *American three point striped and twilled cotton blanket* by an application to the medical gentlemen of the army, at most all the forts and military stations in the United

States. The Purveyor's office, having effected some satisfactory specimen of these goods, during the trials and privations of the embargo, and under the prospect or possibility of war, they have been issued for the hospital use in a moderate and prudent proportion, as a fair though cautious experiment. There is no doubt that *cotton wool* will defend all our families, our military hospitals and our garrisons from suffering for the want of the important and necessary article of *Blankets*. It has been heretofore suggested, that there would be no difficulty in inducing housekeepers to exchange their woollen blankets in time of want and war, for home made cotton blankets, which last would not well suit the soldiers in wet seasons, *in the field*. It is earnestly advised that the manufacturers of cotton should inspect these various specimens of cotton blankets in the several posts from New-Hampshire or Maine to New Orleans, for the purpose of instructing their workmen to imitate and improve upon them. It is very important that the coarsest, shortest and worst colored cotton will serve for blankets. The short staple is the most suitable, because the pile can be most easily raised by the cards, which is the great matter in the formation of a comfortable and good blanket. These American cotton blankets have been distributed throughout the Union for the purpose of spreading a knowledge of a manufacture so interesting and so little understood. Our manufacturers have the advantage over those of Europe, in this article by sixty per cent in unavoidable costs and charges, which the transportation of the cotton to Europe and of the goods from Europe occasions.

"Notes on Wool, on Blankets and on Kerseys." *The Reporter*, 14 March 1812

There is good reason to believe, that twelve millions of pounds weight of sheep's wool, were wrought in the year 1810, into goods which are usually *fulled*, within the U. States. The *unfulled* goods were also considerable in amount. Our increase in sheep and wool is manifest and steady. Our intelligence and skill, in the woolen branch, from the breeding and care of sheep to the finishing of woolen and worsted goods, is constantly extended. Yet the business requires much improvement.

It is proposed to offer to the planters, farmers, manufacturers and capitalists of the United States, some details of the woolen branch, which it may not have been within their power to obtain.

Two of the most useful articles of woolen manufacture are the plain man's tweeled blanket, called the three *point* blanket, and the plain man's tweeled kersey, or narrow Cloth.

The three *point* Blanket is made well, when it is three pounds and one quarter or three pounds and one half in weight; in width one yard and one half; and in length two yards. It has a broad blue or dark stripe near to each end, and in one corner are three blue marks woven in, of the length and breadth of a long slender finger. These are the *points*, which, give the name or distinction to the blanket. The European blankets have been too often made as low in weight as two pounds and one half, and without the tweel, within the last four or five years, and yet they have been shipt from Europe under the Invoice name of three point Blankets. This deception greatly injures the buyer, and the consumer or wearer.

The three point Blankets are of the utmost importance to *military* supply by land and by sea: in the Hospitals, the garrisons and the field; as also on the Ocean. They are of importance in the Indian commerce and intercourse: and are strong family Blankets.

These three point blankets are made in England at the *whole* sale cash price of seven shillings sterling for each blanket weighing three pounds and one half, when the business is well done, and when payment is made in gold or silver. The proper wool is that of the heavy fleeced breed, called the Lincolnshire breed, though the wool of the breeds raised on the rich drained swamps, marshes or fens throughout England is also employed. It is to be remembered that the average weight of the fleece of the

full blooded Lincolnshire breed, raised within that country, is considered to be ten pounds. The price there for this wool is eight and one half to nine pence sterling, equal to sixteen of sixteen end [illegible] half cents.The wool which will card will do for blankets. The rest is combed, the weight of the earcase of the sheep of that breed, fed on the rich re[illegible] fens of Lincolnshire is proportionally heavy.

This wool has another peculiar value, much of it will do for the hand comber or for the combing machine, and may be wrought into *worsted* stuffs, such as shalloons, rattinents, durants, camblets, hombazettes, moreens, worsted damasks, joans spinnings, wildbores, calimancoes, and worsted hosiery, and into worsted chain or warp for woolen weft or fillings, by which Great Britain obtains a vast contribution from all countries. But to return to the important article of woolen blankets, which is made of the short part of the long wooled fleeces.

It is well worthy of remembrance that the English actually and regularly *chop* their wool when it is too Long, to enable them to get up a rich coat of pile upon their point blankets, and to enable them to card long combing wool.

The English clean and raise their blankets, and other coarse woolens in the fulling mill, both by soap and fullers earth, a *soapy clay*. They raise and thicken their blankets, in a great degree, by the fulling mill, and then still more by the card. They give a moderate coat to the inside and a full rich coat of pile to the outside; making them very thick, so as to fill the hand when grasped. This operation requires the careful attention and utmost exertions of our manufacturers and fullers, for their pains and skill should be much the greater, because our coursest wool (taken by the fleece) is too fine, [inelligible] and short for blankets.

To obtain a good thickness to blankets, to make them easy and safe to card up into a moderate coat on the lower side and a rich coat on the upper side, it is absolutely necessary that even the chain or warp be not too hardly twisted; and that the west[?] or filling be not so much twisted as the carp or chain. It should only [inelligible] twisted so as to enable the weavers to work it. It is in managing these points well and in not driving the web too hard up in the loom, and not making the web too close and tight, that the first foundations of a good blanket are laid. THe fuller must not omit to do his part, using his judicious endeavours to thicken the blanket, and to prepare it to yield enough of its pile easily to the card; moderately on the lower side, but considerably on the upper side. By loosening a dozen yarns of chain and filling of a point blanket, instruction will be obtained.

The *flushings* or *lion skins* for great coats are made in the same way, and indeed are nothing more than good tweeled blanketing well raised and regularly on the upper side and dyed blue, brown, olive or drab.

The Kersey will be the subject of another note, being also very important to the industrious and the military part of our citizens, and to the cultivators, manufacturers and capitants[?].

Extract of Agent Joseph B. Varnum to Superintendent of Indian Trade John Mason, May 1812

May — 1812

I hand you herewith samples of such articles as are at present most wanted for the Indian Department.

The following general description of the most material article will give you an idea of the quality & fashion indispensably requisite. A 3 Point Blanket should measure in length 6 feet, in breadth 5 feet 2 inches and weigh when dressed 4 pounds.

A 2 1/2 Point Blanket should measure in length 5 feet 2 inches, in breadth 4 feet 4 inches, and weigh when dressed 3 pound 2 [?] Both should be woven twilled, all white except two crop stripes of very dark blue placed two inches distance from each end of the Blanket, and each stripe should not be less than, nor more than four inches wide; near one of the stripes should be placed the Points also of dark blue, extending inward from the selvag[?] to shew on the right side of the Blanket; they should be half an inch wide, and four inches long for the whole Points & two inches long for the half Points. The Blanket after milling should be dressable as to raise a long shag at per sample[?], & should be raised most on the side the points shew.—

Stroud (a very coarse cloth) should be six quarters wide and weigh when dressed from 18 to 20 Ounces per yard, to be coloured with a dark blue, or Red, principally the former; and to have a narrow strip of white left in dying about an inch & one fourth from each edge as per sample; to be regularly put up in pieces of about 20 yards each.

Indian Cloths should be six quarters wide, & have a white stripe left in dying upon each side as per sample; quality about the same as Samples—

Both strouds & Cloths should be put up double as to width, and in [?] of about 17 inches for convenience of Packing & In addition to the above described articles there will be occasionally wanted a few Swanskins flannel Serges &c.—

Extract of Colonel Benjamin Hawkins to Governor William Hawkings, 8 May 1812

Creek Agency, 8th May 1812

I have just returned from a Council of the Creeks at Cowetun … We manufacture almost every thing we use at home—hats, saddles, shoes, tin—tan leather, make our cabinet ware, our clothing, and shall make our blankets. I have 200 sheep and am to have a Merino rum in the month of October next. One of our Indians, Uploies, has made 15 blankets, 12 of the striped and size of the London Dufile, which sold at $4 a blanket.

Extract of Superintendent of Indian Trade John Mason to James Moore, 29 July 1812

Indian Office 29 July 1812

Gentlemen

Mr. Howells me of your house with whom I had the pleasure of conversing some weeks ago at this office - on the subject of woolen manufacturers - Took with him some some [sic] samples of such Blankets and coarse cloths as we have been accustomed to purchase for Indian supplies - If you can furnish the public with articles of similar Kind of reasonable prices - I shall be glad to deal with you and it is probable I may take a considerable quantity - I hand you enclosed a particular description of these and a note of the prices which we have generally paid - as some as you have informed yourselves by trial or otherwise I shall be glad to hear from you - and if you are as[?] disposed to receive your proposals with sample Blankets and pieces of Cloth—

Under present circumstances I must expect to pay something more than heretofore for these articles - but as it is my duty to buy them in as cheaply as I can with propriety be done - I hope you will make your proposals as low at once as you can afford to give them at and the sooner the better as I expect

to receive very shortly proposals from several other manufactories who have had samples and similar minutes from this office—[1]

… Both strouds and cloths should be put up double as to width, and in folds of about 17 inches for convenience of packing—

The prices we have been accustomed to pay wholesale dealers for imported articles when foreigner commerce was unrestricted - were as follows—

For 3 point Blankets $4.50 to 4.75$ per Pair

For 2 ½ -"- ditto - 3.40 to 3.70 per Pair

Superintendent of Indian Trade John Mason to J. M. Conrad, 19 October 1813

Indian Office October 19th 1813

Sir,

In consequence of the conversation I had with you last Month at your Factory on the subject of manufacturing Blankets for the Indian Supply. I now send enclosed a Memorandum as are proposed for that use - and I have forwarded by the Stage directed to you in a linen package - a 3 point [blanket] exactly such as are used of the best quality for the Indian Consumption as a pattern, which you will be pleased to take care of & return A portion of the supply as we may occasionally want, may of lighter texture and weight say from ½ to 1lb less ℔Blanket, but the dimentions [sic] must be the same-

If you can imitate these Blankets well and offer to give them to us at such prices as may be found to answer it is probable the annual demand of you would be considerable.— I would suggest the propriety of making a few for trial in the first instance - to be left for Inspection to this Office, with a note of the lowest price at which you can furnish a quantity for Cash payments. If you wish to make the trial no time should be lost in sending the sample Blankets, as we lay in our supplies in Winter to be sent off very early in Spring. And if I contract with you, it will be necessary to ascertain the quantity to be calculated from you very soon. Very respectfully I am

JM: S:I.T.

Description of Point Blankets

A 3 Point Blanket should measure in length 6 feet & in width 5 feet 2 Inches & should weight 4lb
A 2 ½ Point Blanket should measure in length 5 f. 2 ½ Inches in width 4f 4 Inches & should weigh 32/16lb[?]

The Borders must be a good Indigo Blue not less than three or more than 4 Inches broad, & at least two inches from the edge of the Blanket.- The Points must be placed close together, & care must be taken that they be in the proper Order of the Blanket, to ascertain this take the Blanket by the borders hold it up with the points out & down, if the points are on the left hand side they are properly placed- It is very material that the Wool be dressed downward with the points (which are woven next the ground) to shed vain the latter.—

The 3 point Blanket sent as a sample is one of good quality & well suited for the Indian Trade it will be found very marly[?] to answer the above description in every particular—

[1] The description given by this letter of the "most material articles [that] will give an Idea of the quality and fashion indispensibly requisite" is the same as the description given by the May 1812 letter from Joseph B. Varnum.

2 ½ point Blankets should be of the same between & should only differ from a 3 point Blanket in size & in the points which are made thus instead of 3 parallel marks of equal length, as on the 3 point Blanket.—

DEPICTIONS

E-Mail: sugarbushb@gmail.com

Figure 1. Rudolf Steiger, a deputation of Chippewas that visited the governor-general in 1815, the woman in the centre and man on the right are shown wearing point blankets, *Deputation of Indians from the Chippewa Tribes to the President of Upper Canada, Sir Frederic Ph. Robinson, K.C.B., Major General, etc., in 1815,* 1815, drawing, 25.5 x 35.8 cm, object no. 30237.

Figure 2. Anna Maria Von Phul, A painting of an Indian woman in 1818 wearing a 3 point Indian trade blanket, 1818, painting,

E-Mail: sugarbushb@gmail.com

Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, object no. 1953-158-0026, http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/197916.

Figure 3. Arthur Burtrand, the earliest known drawing of a Shawnee man wearing a blanket on his shoulder, *A Shawanoe from the Illinois Country*, 1796, drawing.

Figure 4. Hyde de Neuville, a sketch of an Iroquois family, the two women are seen wearing point blankets, *Indian Family*, 1807, drawing, The New York Historical, New York City, object no. 37584, https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/37584/indian-seneca-mohawk-or-oneida-family-verso-sketch-fr.

Figure 5. Hyde de Neuville, a sketch of a Seneca parent and child, *Squah of Seneca Tribe with his papou*, 1808, The New York Historical, New York City, object no. 19717, https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/19717/Seneca-squah-and-papoose-western-new-york.

Figure 6. Hyde de Neuville, a sketch of an Oneida woman wearing a point blanket, *mary, Squah of The oneida tribe*, 1807, The New York Historical, New York City, object no. 7166, https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/7166/Mary-a-squah-of-the-oneida-tribe.

Figure 7. A detail of three Ojibwe women by a fire all wearing point blankets, *Kingston Dockyards and Citadel from the Town*, 1816, LAC drawing, object no. 2836611.

Figure 8. A watercolour of a deputation of chiefs from British-aligned Mississippi tribes, note the three women in point blankets, *Deputation of Indians from the Mississippi Tribes,* 1814, LAC, drawing, object no. 2836239.

E-Mail: sugarbushb@gmail.com